

[Peter Dowd response to Public Accounts Committee report into Concentrix](#)

Peter

Dowd MP, Labour's Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, commenting on the Public Accounts Committee report into Concentrix, said:

"The findings by the Public Accounts Committee reaffirms the Government's continued inability to take responsibility for the shambolic decision to contract out tax credits to Concentrix. It is now crystal clear that Concentrix should never have been awarded the contact.

"This damning report reveals what many of us have long suspected, first that neither HMRC nor Concentrix bothered to check for error or fraud before suspending tax credits to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

"
Secondly, that Concentrix's claims of mass savings were inflated from the start; they have barely recouped one fifth of their initial savings figure. Third, that HMRC is woefully ill-equipped to outsource such important decisions to the private sector, instead of penalising Concentrix for mistakes HMRC tripled its commission.

"This whole saga makes a mockery of the current tendering process. Given these damning findings, Concentrix should be banned from any future Government contracts and the Government should seek to recoup the majority of its commission."

[News story: Defence Secretary boosts Welsh jobs on visit to Aston Martin](#)

and GDUK

The Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, today announced a £330 million contract to design the next-generation of battlefield communications on a visit to Wales. Sir Michael also formally handed over the St Athan 'Super Hangar' to Aston Martin.

Both the Morpheus battlefield communications contract with General Dynamics UK (GDUK), and Aston Martin's investment in St Athan will create and support a thousand jobs across south Wales.

Visiting the General Dynamics UK (GDUK) site at Oakdale, the Defence Secretary spoke of the MOD's new Morpheus programme, a £330 million investment in innovative new tactical communications systems for our Armed Forces, which will support 250 high-tech jobs in South Wales.

While in Wales, the Defence Secretary handed over the former MOD Super Hangar to Aston Martin at a special ceremony at St Athan. The redevelopment of the site into a state of the art manufacturing facility for the British luxury carmaker will directly create 750 new jobs in South Wales, and support thousands more as production starts in 2019.



Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon speaking at St Athan to handover the former RAF site to Aston Martin. Crown Copyright.

Speaking at General Dynamics UK's Oakdale site in South Wales, Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This £330 million contract for the next generation of battlefield communications, supporting 250 high skilled jobs, underlines the importance of Wales to our Armed Forces.

Backed by a rising defence budget, last year MOD spent £870 million with Welsh businesses helping to build a stronger economy and keep Britain safe.

As well as investing in new equipment we are also investing in a Better Defence Estate for our Armed Forces. Aston Martin's decision to build a new facility on land we no longer need will bring more high skilled jobs to Wales.

This state of the art communications system will be integrated on to the Army's new Ajax vehicles, currently under construction by GDUK, and allow British troops to rapidly deploy new radios and applications to connect with commanders and allies. The system will also be used by the RAF and Royal Navy on a range of platforms, and provide our personnel with modernised command and control networks they need to keep Britain safe.

Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns said:

Wales is quickly establishing a strong reputation as an important hub of high skilled manufacturing. General Dynamics UK has long been instrumental in putting Wales on the front line when it comes to supporting our country's defence and security needs.

And thanks to the close partnerships between the UK Government and the prestigious Aston Martin brand, the St Athan site is springing back to life as a significant centre of employment, bringing with it valuable skills and a lasting legacy for the entire region.

Today's announcements are testament to this Government's determination to strengthen every part of the United Kingdom, and are a strong indicator that Wales is open for business, open for trade, and open for investment.

The MOD is investing £3.5 billion in Ajax, which will be in service with the Army from 2020. With new innovative equipment like Ajax and Morpheus, and new ways of working the Army of the future will be able to successfully tackle a wider range of threats and keep the UK safe.

Army Chief Information Officer, Major General Richard Semple,

said:

Becoming the owner of architecture for MOD's tactical command and control systems is critical to getting up-to-date, ever evolving, battle-winning technology into the hands of our soldiers, sailors and airmen on operations; this is a critical component of digital transformation in the Army and Land Environment.

The Defence Secretary also met with some of GDUK's apprentices, who play an important role in the Defence Industry. The MOD is the largest provider of apprentices in the UK, enrolling 14,200 new apprentices across the Armed Services and in the civil service over the last year, and is committed to encouraging defence suppliers to support apprenticeships across their business.

Statement from UKIP Party Chairman

UKIP Chairman Paul Oakden said, "We are disappointed to hear that Mark Reckless has decided to leave UKIP in order to join the Conservatives in the Welsh Assembly.

"When Mark joined UKIP in 2014 we admired his long-term commitment to Brexit and his decision to put his country first.

"Having been elected as a Conservative in Rochester & Strood, Mark didn't think it right to sit as an MP for another party without asking the electorate for their endorsement in a by-election. A position that was right as it was honourable. In the campaign that followed, our membership worked incredibly hard to ensure that Mark retained his seat.

Sport is force of social empowerment and an engine for equality – UNESCO

6 April 2017 – There is no more powerful platform for promoting shared values than sport, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Irina Bokova, said in a message marking the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace.

"Sport is a passion shared by women and men across the world. It is a force

for [physical well-being and social empowerment](#). It is an engine for equality, especially gender equality, for including everyone, especially the most disadvantaged,” Ms Bokova said in her message on the Day.

Sport also promotes solidarity, respect, teamwork, responsibility, honesty, self-esteem and motivation, she said. However, despite the positive benefits, 3.2 million deaths are attributed to physical inactivity every year.

“This is why UNESCO has joined forces with the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) to combat sedentary lifestyles, starting with inclusive and equitable quality physical education at school,” Ms Bokova said.

The Director-General also called for new commitment from all actors to ensuring public policies in fields of education, health, transport and urban planning work also with the private sector to develop legislation and national plans for sport.

“As the world takes forward the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, we must do everything to support sport to leave no one behind,” she said, while commending the work of volunteers dedicated to supporting sport for peace and development around the world.

RELATED: [With more people sedentary, WHO urges everyone to get moving](#)

In November 2015, the UNESCO member States adopted the new [International Charter of Physical Education and Sport](#), the spirit of which was ensuring respect for the fundamental right to sport for all men and women without discrimination, Ms Bokova said. “Sport is a way to include everyone, including [refugees and migrants](#), to fight against stereotypes, to strengthen the foundations for peace in healthy society,” she added. In August 2013, the sixty-seventh session of the UN General Assembly decided to proclaim 6 April as the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#).

[Press release: Antrim Area Hospital visit](#)

Earlier this morning the Secretary of State, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, visited Antrim Area hospital to see at first hand the issues and challenges that our current Health Service professionals face on a daily basis, and how the current political instability and lack of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland continues to add further burdens to an already pressurised health system.

The Northern Health Trust, of which Antrim Area Hospital is one of the major hospitals provides services for a population of approximately 471,000 – the largest resident population in Northern Ireland. Over recent months, the

Trust have launched a reform and modernisation of the services they provide with a strong emphasis on maximising the range and sustainability of local services as well as ensuring integrated, and locality based community services delivered in partnership to allow and support people to live independently and avoid hospitalisation as far as possible.

Speaking after his visit, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

I was absolutely delighted to be able to visit Antrim Area Hospital and witness the truly remarkable work that is delivered by the doctors, nurses and support health care professionals on a daily basis. They provide a modernised approach to healthcare, ensuring local people can avail of a range of services close to their home locality. But the lack of devolved institutions provide uncertainty for those providing vital front line services.

Public services will suffer if there continues to be political stalemate. Budgets need to be established in order to provide much needed services for the public. That is why I am urging the political parties to continue to talk and find a way through the outstanding issues. It remains important that an agreement is reached which enables the restoration of devolved government – this is absolutely critical for Northern Ireland and its people.

Whilst I recognise some of the issues are difficult, they are not insurmountable. The window in which this can happen is narrow, but it is my hope that the politicians will do all in their power to help to bring about the resumption of secure devolved government, an objective supported by the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, is our shared aim.

We owe it to the entire community to deliver the best outcome for Northern Ireland – strong devolved government with locally accountable Ministers.